

## Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening



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### CEPPS/IFES Quarterly Report: 1 April – 30 June, 2012

**IRAQ: Elections Support Project**  
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International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)  
1850 K Street NW , Fifth Floor  
Washington, DC 20006  
Phone: +1 202-350-6700  
Fax: +1 20-350-6701  
[info@ifes.org](mailto:info@ifes.org)

## I. SUMMARY

This quarter, the Elections Support Project (ESP) focused on planning future capacity building activities, strategizing with counterparts, and working on the planning and development of a nationwide survey gauging public opinion and knowledge of the electoral process in Iraq, as well as a civic and voter education sub-grants program. While the project focused intensely on assessments and planning, two important workshops and a technical conference were also held (see Table 1). The workshops, a BRIDGE event and a financial control training, each had notable outcomes, which are explained in further detail below. Furthermore, IFES deepened its cooperation with the United Nations (UN), holding a series of joint coordination meetings, sharing capacity building activities, and providing mutual support to major objectives. Taken as a whole, the accomplishments of this quarter will guide future IFES activities in the months to come.

IFES developed a series of assessments for each of the IHEC Departments, which were duly sent to Department and Section Heads. The assessments were created in-house and the questions were designed for each department, with IFES technical advisors serving as interlocutors. The

assessments, which contain a wealth of information about the inner workings of the IHEC, will provide valuable information on which to base future trainings that meet IHEC needs and will be a part of information packages for newly elected Commissioners.

The two workshops that IFES facilitated this quarter were particularly notable. The BRIDGE Curriculum Preparation workshop, which was held from 1 – 8 June in Erbil, refined BRIDGE Modules for use in the Iraq context. The workshop also identified target groups and delivery options, developed an implementation schedule, and resulted in a basic analysis of the curriculum's effectiveness. The result of the event was a realistic implementation plan that will be used to deliver BRIDGE trainings through the end of the program.

From 2 – 8 June, IFES facilitated the Procurement Financial Control Workshop in Erbil. The event was the first IFES workshop to employ both a pre- and post-workshop participant test (previous trainings utilized a post-workshop survey to assess training delivery); this will serve to improve IFES' technical advisors and monitoring and evaluation staff's ability to analyze the extent to which the IHEC participants are enhancing their abilities at IFES-sponsored trainings. The training, likewise, imparted procurement practices that would help the IHEC effectively acquire electoral materiel ahead of future elections.

This past quarter also witnessed collaboration in IFES and UN planning. The organizations have held bi-weekly coordination meetings in which details of upcoming activities, staff recruitment, and challenges are shared.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, IFES has worked closely and concurrently with the UN and the IHEC in order to share ideas, activities and objectives, and to avoid operational redundancy. Particularly notable is the mutual support IFES and the UN provided each other in relation to their planned nationwide surveys. The UN shared a draft voter registration survey with IFES and contributed useful input to IFES' own nationwide survey, which will be implemented throughout the next quarter. During the quarter, IFES developed the draft survey questionnaire.

### **IFES and the IHEC Gender Working Group (GWG)**

The IHEC's Gender Working Group was formally established by the IHEC Electoral Administration during this quarter and is comprised of fifteen IHEC staff.

IFES and the UN have met with the working group to discuss a long-term plan for gender-related issues in the electoral process, including the establishment of a Gender Unit within the IHEC. During these discussions, IFES offered to support an internal survey of gender awareness. Also during these discussions, IFES has adamantly stressed that the appropriate way to mainstream gender issues into the IHEC is to target the personnel at large and not simply influential women inside the institution.

IFES will continue to develop ways to implement gender issues into its capacity building program.

Additionally, issues of inclusion will be incorporated into IFES' nationwide survey, which will assess public perceptions of the IHEC and knowledge of the electoral process.

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<sup>1</sup> Meeting minutes are circulated to both IFES and UN staff after these sessions and are also saved in IFES' own internal archive. The minutes are informal, however, and no recommendations are put forth for approval.

In addition to preparing its nationwide survey, IFES has also proceeded with planning for the implementation of its sub-grants program. IFES worked on the development of a draft Request for Applications (RFA) and IFES Iraq staff, particularly the External Media Specialist, has put together a list of over 250 local civil society organizations (CSOs) to serve as a directory of organizations that IFES hopes will make funding proposals. Inclusion on the list is not a prerequisite for receiving funds. Instead, the list serves as a collection of organizations that have previously received funding; it will also serve as a distribution list for the RFA. Furthermore,

### **IFES ESP Staffing**

The IFES Iraq staff make-up has continued to evolve and the project received USAID approval for its Deputy Chief of Party Candidate on 31 May. She is expected to join the program in early August.

Also, as noted in the previous quarterly report, IFES Information Technology/Database Advisor resigned at the end of April. A replacement has been found and will arrive in Iraq early next quarter. While IFES continues to look for a permanent replacement for its recently departed Senior Election Planning Specialist, who left this quarter, a long-term consultant will be brought in early next quarter to provide interim support.

Lastly, IFES recruited a full-time Monitoring and Evaluation staff member, though the position has yet to be formally confirmed by USAID.

IFES has started planning informational seminars on its sub-grants program, which will take place throughout Iraq, in locations to be determined and in coordination and assistance from USAID.

While this past quarter had several successes, IFES has also faced a number of challenges. Chief among them is the timely acquisition of visas from the Iraqi Ministry of Interior (MoI). IFES has only been able to receive 30-day visas, which are extended twice in 10-day increments before a final 10-day exit visa is given, for staff members. Expiration of a visa requires staff to leave the country prior to activating a new visa. IFES has attempted to combine visa activation flights with staff leave, though this has not always been logistically possible. In June, IFES received instruction from USAID on acquiring longer-term visas. At the time of reporting, IFES had submitted the documents required for obtaining these visas from the Government of Iraq (GoI). However, the MoI would not process the visa until receiving a formal letter from the US Embassy confirming the names of personnel authorized to act on IFES' behalf. Additionally, IFES has been informed that processing times were different from what USAID informed IFES. The letter should be submitted early in the fourth quarter.

A second challenge IFES faced this quarter is related to completing the process of becoming a licensed NGO in Iraq. While all of IFES registration documents were submitted to the appropriate authorities in December 2011, IFES was unable to provide a valid housing lease agreement, a required component of that submission. Timely submission of the lease was not possible, as IFES re-bid its security sub-contract, which, along with a life support agreement, are pending USAID approval. When approved, IFES will be able to provide a housing lease to the GoI's NGO Registration Department and complete its registration package, after which it would take about 5-6 months for it to be processed.

The last major challenge IFES faced this quarter was the political context. On 4 June, the IHEC announced that Kurdistan Governorate Council Elections would not be held on their scheduled date of 27 September 2012. The elections were postponed, though no future date was provided. Although IFES was able to immediately adjust its programming schedule for this year, to account for the lack of otherwise required preparation work, the postponement has left IFES with the prospect of no elections in its first year of programming. This will impact performance management goals, as IFES will be unable to meet the target indicators that are tied to elections. Further analysis of the political environment's influence on the ESP follows.

**Table 1: IFES-facilitated Trainings and Workshops, April - June 2012 (Q3FY12)**

Date	Location	Title	Total Participants	% of Female Participants	NO/GEO Participant Distribution
15-16 April	Rotana Hotel, Erbil	Second Scientific Conference: Elections Technology and Iraq – Opportunities and Challenges	39 <sup>2</sup>	15%	31/8
1 – 8 June	Rotana Hotel, Erbil	BRIDGE Curriculum Preparation	24	4% <sup>3</sup>	12/12
2 – 8 June	Rotana Hotel, Erbil	Procurement Financial Controls	34	29%	15/19
<b>Total workshop participants</b>			<b>97</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>58/39</b>

## II. POLITICAL CONTEXT

As ever, Iraq's political environment continued to shift during this reporting period. Claims that Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki has concentrated too much power in his own hands have grown more acute. In June, politicians opposed to Maliki were discussing his removal from office either directly through a no-confidence vote or through a parliamentary investigation into alleged illegal practices, followed by a no-confidence vote. By the end of the month, it became apparent that there would not be enough votes against Maliki, though this has not dissuaded the Prime Minister from exploring options to disband Parliament as a pre-emptive move to protect his position.

This operating period also attested to the fragile political environment in which the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) operates. In April, Faraj Al Haydari, the Chairman of the IHEC, and Karim Al Tamimi, an IHEC commissioner, were arrested and held for four days. The pair was detained on corruption charges, which were subsequently referred to the criminal court. At the end of the third quarter, they have yet to go to trial. Many observers contend that the charges are politically motivated and part of a scheme by Maliki to damage the IHEC's credibility. It remains to be seen if mounting pressure against Maliki will manifest itself in additional strikes at the IHEC or those working with the institution, which may be perceived as standing in opposition to his leadership.

<sup>2</sup> A total of 39 people were invited to participate in either panel discussions or as presenters. Their presence was facilitated by the IHEC and IFES. The total number of people, whose attendance was not facilitated by IFES, such as media and other interested individuals, was 64.

<sup>3</sup> IFES originally expected 15% of the participants to be female, but three were unable to attend for personal reasons. IFES makes every effort to encourage an equitable gender balance at its formal trainings and workshops.

Also in April, the Council of Representatives (CoR) temporarily extended the mandate of the IHEC's Board of Commissioners. The extension was initially given for three months or until a new BoC could be constituted. Iraq's political parties were unable to agree on the composition of the new BoC and the current Board will stay until an agreement is reached. The impasse has impacted the electoral calendar and IFES' activities.

The negotiations may be impacted by the final make-up of the Human Rights Commission (HRC). If some political entities do not have their preferred candidates assume Commissioner roles at the HRC, they may receive some at the IHEC. Whatever the composition of the new BoC, it is likely that the extension will continue for *at least* another three months.

Furthermore, the Kurdish Governorate Council Elections (GCE) were originally scheduled for 27 September, 2012, but were subsequently postponed with no re-scheduled date. Legal complexities were cited as the reason for cancelling the elections; the IHEC claims that laws in Kurdistan require that Christians only vote for Christian candidates. The election was cancelled as the IHEC claims that this restricts voters' rights. Some observers also contend that the elections were more likely cancelled because the two ruling parties – the Patriot Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) – were reluctant to see opposing parties make gains at their expense. Additionally, if a new Board of Commissioners (BoC) was to have been stood up immediately prior to these elections, some contend that it would not have the electoral experience required to carry out the polling. Whatever the reason, no new date for Kurdistan elections has been provided. While Iraqi law requires provincial council elections every four years, until the political entities in the region clamor for elections, they are likely to remain on hold.

IFES has been able to continue programming without interruption, despite the postponing of the Kurdish elections. Additional capacity building operations were implemented and preparatory work for the nationwide GCE next spring have been initiated.

### **III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

#### **Objective 1: IHEC's Strategic Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Capacity is Strengthened**

A major accomplishment this quarter was the conduct of a number of assessments aimed at determining the operational state of each of the IHEC's departments. The assessments were designed to provide a snapshot of each department so that the strategic planning process starts from an informed perspective. Next quarter, IFES plans to bring in an external consultant who will advance strategic planning development considerably, now that the groundwork has been laid.

##### ***1.1.3: Conduct of internal and external organizational assessments***

In late April, IFES staff developed a comprehensive assessment tool for distribution to the IHEC's departments and to the Governorate Electoral Offices (GEOs). The assessments were

designed to give a comprehensive view of the functioning of each department so that IFES could identify key strategic issues that need to be addressed to strengthen the IHEC's management of the institution building process. At the end of the quarter, IFES had received completed assessments from the Finance, Administration, and External Relations Departments. Assessments for the Governorate Electorate Office and Capacity Building and Operations Departments are expected to be completed in July.

IFES employed an enquiry methodology in these assessments. For each Department, IFES advisors listed the areas of responsibility and, from there, came up with a series of questions to assess how well core competencies are executed. This methodology, while more labor intensive, will allow IFES advisors to develop highly specific plans to strengthen the institution. The utility of these assessments will be to inform the strategic planning process, which IFES will support in the coming months.

Though the final analyses of the assessments are still underway, IFES has made the following, preliminary conclusions:

- **Finance Department:** The budget process accounting standards, and internal control systems all need significant strengthening. While it will be up to the IHEC to take ownership of the improvement process, IFES advisors have developed options to address the findings of the assessment – either through on-the-job trainings or formal workshop events.
- **Administration Department:** the assessment finds that records keeping, training procedures, and internal reporting processes are in need of improvement. There are no electronic formats for keeping records, which prevents implementation of backup systems needed for safe record retention. Also, there is no specific development officer responsible for administrative training. Finally, the internal reporting procedures are unclear and hinder reliable information transfer within the Department. Each of these weaknesses will be addressed in future IFES workshops and continual on-the-job training.
- **External Relations:** The assessment finds that the IHEC needs to improve the systems and work practices related to public outreach in order to enhance the IHEC's ability to sustain long-term and effective public outreach. A major finding is that the IHEC should work to improve its ability to maintain a lasting, continuous relationship with stakeholders and not only reach out to them directly before electoral events. IFES support will heavily focus on facilitating the IHEC's ability to do this.

Assessments for Capacity Building and Operations Departments, along with the GEOs, are ongoing and will be reported next quarter.

## **Objective 2: IHEC's Internal Management Processes and Systems are strengthened**

IFES advisors worked on supporting a number of internal management processes this quarter. Much of this focused on improving the internal reporting and communication structures in the

institution and on enhancing financial management capacity. Additionally, a BRIDGE preparatory workshop was held, the result of which provided the framework that will guide delivery of the curriculum through the end of the program.

### ***Activity 2.1: Support to the IHEC's IT systems and infrastructure***

On 15 and 16 April, IFES and the IHEC co-facilitated the *Second Scientific Conference of the Independent High Electoral Commission: Elections Technology and Iraq – Opportunities and Challenges*. IFES managed the logistics and provision of consultants for this event, while the IHEC oversaw the thematic content and production of materials. Both institutions shared costs.



Figure 1: Second Scientific Conference of the Independent High Electoral Commission: Elections Technology and Iraq – Opportunities and Challenges, 15-16 April, Erbil.

Day one commenced with lectures on elections technology by three international experts, whose participation was funded by IFES. The experts offered insights on voting technology from Uganda, Egypt, and Sudan. Day two offered participants the opportunity to take part in various panel discussions whose topics included: technology and the electoral legal framework; electronic voting systems; electronic identification methodologies; and, technology and the electoral process in Iraq. The sessions were chaired by IHEC Directors and by subject matter experts from Iraqi universities.

The conference concluded with a list of recommendations on the use of technology in elections in Iraq. These recommendations are presented in full below:

- Iraq should endeavor to adopt new legislation for election technology for the entire electoral process;
- CSOs should be encouraged to disseminate education about ICT and its applications in elections;
- A census should be carried out, in order to establish a unified national database that would improve polling center function;

- ICT infrastructure should be developed with safeguards, such as the protection of voter's data;
- The Iraqi government should look for ways to shepherd the increased use of ICT in elections;
- Lessons from countries with a similar electoral environment to Iraq should be studied and applied;
- An applied ICT center should be created to advise the IHEC on ICT issues; and
- Iraqi universities and subject matter experts should be included in discussions on the use of technology in elections whenever possible.

Some of these recommendations are not currently feasible in Iraq. A census would be highly beneficial for statistical data and voter registration purposes, but such an undertaking would enflame simmering social divisions. Nevertheless, IFES is encouraging the IHEC to implement the recommendations where possible and will examine the extent to which these suggestions are followed in the coming months. For its own part, IFES will encourage CSOs taking part in its sub-grants program to seek sustainable and novel ways to employ ICT techniques to conduct voter education campaigns where appropriate and has incorporated this element into the draft RFA.

***Activity 2.2: Capacity building support to the IHEC's database and software developers and staff***

In April, IFES' Information Technology and Database (IT/D) Advisor assisted the IHEC's programmers with testing VRU software. The software was under development for several months prior, and testing at this point was done to identify coding flaws and bugs. Identified issues were rectified as they were found.

Also in early April, the IFES IT/D Advisor assisted the IHEC programmers in developing the complaints database, which, when finished, will be a web-based database used to store complaints about voter registration and election results. IFES' advisor served as an interlocutor between the Database Section and the Complaint Section in the development of this software.

In June, the IHEC conducted a simulation of the data entry process for voter registration update at the Data Entry Centre (DEC). The IHEC BoC attended the event in the presence of professors from local universities. The participants went through different phases of the data entry process. The IHEC issued a press release the same day emphasizing its improved ability to develop software.

***Activity 2.4: Support to the IHEC's internal communication and reporting structures***

The postponement of the Kurdistan Regional Elections has bought the IHEC time to rethink its communication and outreach structures and strategies before the countdown to the Governorate Council Elections next year. IFES, in collaboration with the UN, has been working with the Department and Section heads on a series of SWOT exercises to build on the professional capacity that exists at individual level across the Department and to address the structural, procedural, and conceptual issues that are present.

This assessment is a constructive engagement with that process and is a work in progress. It will try to identify a preliminary strategy to build the capacity of the IHEC Public Outreach Department (POD) in line with the needs addressed through discussions with POD staff, a review of recommendations made over the past six years by IFES, the UN Election Assistance Team (UNEAT) and other actors.

IFES advisors have worked with the POD to develop a weekly reporting format for the GEOs, which share information related to the four POD sections in the National Office (NO) – Electoral Media, External Media, Political Entities, and Public Relations.

The need for a unified reporting format became apparent in May, when IFES staff discovered that only the External Media Section received regular updates of media activities from the GEOs. Additionally, information was rarely shared between the four NO departments. This created a problem for both the NO and GEOs because neither could respond effectively to requests for information related to POD stakeholders. Another problem was that the lack of information sharing contributed to perceptions that the IHEC NO does not effectively cooperate with GEOs.

While there have been several previous efforts to encourage regular reporting from GEO to NO, these initiatives have focused mainly on information sharing in the run-up to electoral events, and not towards building a sustainable process. IFES' External Media Specialist has worked with the POD to remedy the nature of the reporting process. Part of this assistance has been focused on the development of an intensive three day workshop, to occur next quarter, that will consist of reviewing reporting formats proposed by IHEC HQ/POD (based on a template developed for the 2008 Governorate Council Elections), discussing constraints to effective reporting, developing tools and techniques to facilitate stakeholder monitoring, and presenting Section Head reporting needs, in order to explain the GEOs role in the overall strategic communications process.

The workshop will lead to the eventual creation of a systematic methodology for reporting, followed by implementation of strengthened reporting procedures. These procedures will facilitate ongoing outreach, rather than outreach tied only to electoral events.

### ***Activity 2.5: Support to the IHEC Directorates of Finance and Administration with the introduction of financial controls, accounting, and finance systems***

#### ***2.5.1: Review of current financial systems, documentation and mapping of financial processes, and development of financial management procedures***

IFES' Organizational Management Advisor produced a comprehensive review of the current financial systems within the IHEC, as mentioned above.

The Finance Department Assessment explored the budget development process, budget implementation, budget control, regulations and procedures, human capacity, financial databases, reporting systems, and training. The completed assessment identifies the technical ability of the Finance Department staff as one of its key assets. Out of 25 people who took the survey, 14 (or 56%) have degrees in finance, financial management, accounting, or management. This is

significant as a USAID audit report of the previous electoral assistance project indicates that there is a severe mismatch between staff education, background, and the positions held.<sup>4</sup> The assessment also points out that the software utilized by the Finance Department has no back-up capability. Records are kept, but it is a tedious process.

IFES advisors are currently reviewing the assessment and producing recommendations. Based on these, IFES will be able to assist the IHEC in implementing procedures and systems to develop the financial management procedures that will improve the Department.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Activity 2.6: Support to the IHEC Finance and Administration Directorates to Improve Staff Capacity to Prepare and Execute Budgets***

#### ***2.6.1: Development of procedures for budget preparation and execution and implementation of comprehensive training on the preparation of institutional and operational budgets***

The IFES-facilitated Procurement Financial Control Workshop, which took place from 2 - 8 June in Erbil, delivered a useful tutorial on administrative and financial procedures related to the IHEC's procurement process. The workshop was a necessary component of improving budget execution, as the procurement process has potential for abuse and mismanagement. A total of 34 participants attended the event, 10 of whom are women. The workshop, which is part of a series of procurement trainings, delivered the required information that will later allow the IHEC to streamline and improve its procurement process.

The objective of the workshop was to provide the IHEC participants with a strong foundation in procurement management. Topics for the event included: procurement financial operations; procurement law; financial responsibilities and duties for tenders and bids; contract requirements; and, special procedures related to polling materials.

The training partners included the Head of the Department of Audit and Internal Control and the Internal Control Section Head, who briefed participants on the IHEC's procurement process and indicated its problematic aspects. Also, IFES'

### **IFES Workshop Participant Knowledge Testing**

The test, consisting of a pre- and post-workshop quizzes, administered by IFES advisors at the Procurement Financial Control Workshop this quarter contained 15 multiple choice questions and five open ended questions. Participants answering three or more questions correctly on the second test are considered to have acquired enhanced electoral knowledge, an IFES performance indicator.

The test is built in response to USAID suggestions for evaluating the impact of its workshops and also to help guide IFES programming by informing future workshop content and areas of the IHEC that require procedural assistance.

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<sup>4</sup> United States Agency for International Development, Office of the Inspector General, *Audit of USAID/Iraq's Electoral Technical Assistance Program: Audit Report No. E-267-12-003-P*, 22 March 2012 (p. 7)

<sup>5</sup> Per IFES' PMP, IFES expects to implement two procedures designed to strengthen administrative capacity of the IHEC, including ICT management, finance and accounting, communications, etc. in FY2012.

Organizational Management Advisor presented concepts on advanced fiscal controls related to the procurement process and instructed participants on the importance of ethics and transparency. The IFES advisor used the workshop to build a procurement policy framework that will enable the IHEC to implement standard procurement procedures in the near future.

Also notable is that the workshop was the first to implement the IFES-designed participant assessment tool, which will aid in program guidance and monitoring and evaluation. The test, which was given in the beginning and at the end of the event, established the participants' procurement knowledge baseline and measured its change. Given the relative dearth of procurement expertise at the IHEC, participants correctly answered an average of 34% of the questions on the initial test. After delivery of the training material, the percentage of correctly answered questions rose to 69%.



The same test is delivered at both ends of the workshop, allowing advisors to determine if there are concepts that cause particular difficulty for the participants and to assess the extent to which new knowledge was absorbed.

Figure 2: Procurement Financial Control Workshop, 2 – 8 June, Erbil.

IFES' staff assessed the workshop test results and found that 80% or 24 out of 30 of participants indicated enhanced electoral administration knowledge (see Appendix A: Performance Indicator Reference Sheets), which is defined as an increase of three or more correct questions. IFES uses three additional correct questions as a way to mitigate against the likelihood that a participant is guessing and also as a way to ensure that the threshold for enhanced knowledge is significant. Three questions represent twenty percent of the test and a twenty percent increase in electoral knowledge resulting from a workshop is a significant achievement. Similar tests will be administered for on-the-job trainings, where appropriate.

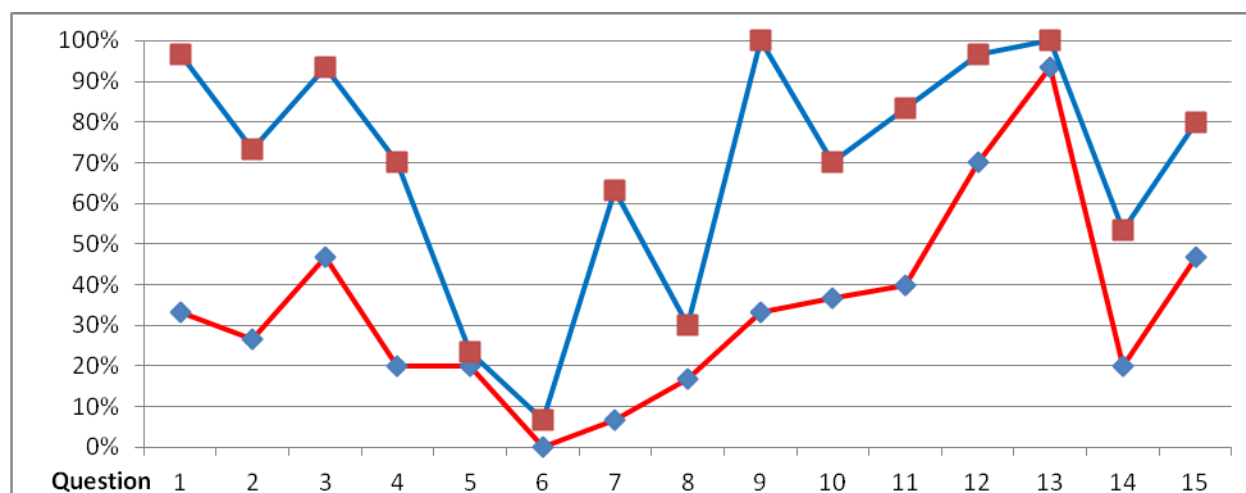
Additionally, IFES determined from the final test that the IHEC staff still struggle with procurement transparency and internal and external procurement networks, which are questions five and six, respectively, in Table 2 below. The red line is the percentage of questions answered correctly in the initial test and the blue line is the percentage of questions answered correctly in the post-workshop test.

This test indicates that both of these issues will need to receive additional focus in future on-the-job trainings and workshops. Testing also allows IFES, along with his IHEC counterparts, to

identify which procurement standards will need to be included in the development of future procurement standard operating procedures.

IFES monitoring and evaluation staff will use the test delivered at this workshop to build a template that will be issued, as appropriate, at all future IFES-facilitated events.

**Table 2: Procurement Financial Workshop Participant Performance**



### ***Activity 2.8: Implementation of a comprehensive electoral training curriculum based on the BRIDGE curriculum***

From 1 to 8 June, IFES-facilitated a BRIDGE Preparatory Workshop. The workshop was designed to refine the BRIDGE curriculum for the Iraq environment, as well as establish parameters guiding delivery of the program. The workshop also explored the creation of a new section in the Capacity Building Department that will be responsible for managing BRIDGE training. This initiative was built into the agenda as a way for IFES to ensure the sustainability of not only technical electoral training, but to sustain BRIDGE's Train the Facilitators (TtF) component, which greatly enhances the IHEC's teambuilding and public speaking and leadership capacity.

Specifically, the workshop resulted in the development of four customized BRIDGE modules that will be implemented in the coming months. These modules include:

- **Electoral Systems and Strategic Planning:** This module will explore electoral systems design and will also introduce and examine how successful strategic planning supports any electoral endeavour.
- **Civic Education and Electoral Contestants:** This module will provide instruction on the rationale and principles of civic education.
- **Pre-Election Activities, Polling, and Counting Results:** This module will emphasize logistics, operations, and planning related to the preparation, execution, and follow-up to electoral events.

- **Media:** The media module will cover electoral structures and processes, media regulation, campaign and election coverage, and voter education.

All of the IHEC's fully accredited facilitators, along with several of its semi-accredited trainers, attended the event. Leading facilitation were an international BRIDGE facilitator and six IHEC staff. The staff currently serve as Section Heads, Unit Managers, and Associates in both the National and Governorate Electoral Offices.

The first of these modules will be implemented in Erbil next quarter, after Ramadan.

### **Objective 3: IHEC capacity to manage external affairs with key external stakeholders is improved**

IFES has diligently pursued this objective in this quarter. Significant progress was made on the development of the nationwide survey and the sub-grants program. Both will be launched next quarter. Additionally, a number of outreach initiatives have started, with workshops and deliverables to start occurring before the end of this fiscal year.

In May, IFES External Media Advisor conducted a desk review of reports and recommendations on the IHEC relations with media and other external stakeholders made since 2007, and of surveys carried out by external organizations since 2005.

A review of legal and regulatory frameworks for media highlighted the critical need to establish or re-establish institutional relationships with the Council of Representatives (CoR), the Communications and Media Commission (CMC), the Iraqi Media Network (IMN) and NGOs. IFES has initiated preliminary discussions with the CMC, the IMN, the CoR Legal Department, the CoR Human Rights Committee and the Iraqi Alliance on Disability (IADO) and will facilitate a review of the IHEC Regulations, procedures and policies to ensure compliance with Iraq's laws and international treaty obligations.

IFES is also reaching out to other Iraqi and international organizations, ranging from UN agencies to NGOs to initiate long term cooperation with the IHEC. Stakeholders include UNESCO, USAID's Access to Justice program, Handicap International, Article 19, Index on Censorship and Internews.

#### ***Activity 3.2: Conduct of National Surveys***

On 1 June, IFES released a Request for Proposals (RFP) in order to select a survey company that will be used to implement the first national survey. The survey will gauge public opinion and knowledge of the electoral process in Iraq as well as measure public perceptions of the IHEC. This survey will establish a baseline. Another survey will take place near the end of this project in 2014. The second survey will indicate change in peoples' perception of the IHEC. Ultimately, the change will assess the extent to which the public has confidence in the electoral authority and will assess the confidence Iraqis have in the electoral process.

The survey, which will be implemented over the course of the next two quarters, will begin with a pre-test of about 40 adults in urban and rural areas. This will be used to identify comprehension problems, appropriateness of response options, and the sensitivities that the questions may arouse.

After the results of the pretest are analyzed, the survey methodology will be refined and will be implemented by sampling 2,500 respondents across Iraq. Survey data will be coded in accordance with the guidelines set forth by IFES.

The IHEC has indicated sensitivity to the survey. A number of senior officials in the Commission have displayed a desire to have the IHEC act as the lead on such a project. While IFES has offered its willingness to include the IHEC in the survey process, the distance the Commission keeps remains to be seen.

Details of the survey questions and methodology were under development at the time of reporting. IFES expects both to be complete early in the fourth quarter. The Chief of Party and External Media Specialist will present the final product to USAID staff at this time.

### ***Activity 3.3 Development of an Effective Media Relations Strategy***

#### ***3.3.1: Development of a strategic communications plan***

The IFES External Media Advisor has developed a draft training concept that can be delivered to the IHEC regarding its strategic communications plan. The training is tentatively scheduled for September.

IFES has been reviewing data obtained through various surveys implemented by the IHEC in the past several years. This information will enable the External Media Advisor to work with the IHEC in identifying systemic weaknesses in public outreach and establish clear goals for a strategic communications plan in the months to come.

Additionally, IFES has reviewed the surveys that have been carried out by international organizations since 2005, which include a baseline survey of public perceptions of the IHEC and electoral processes commissioned by UNDP in 2009. The External Media Specialist is working with the UNDP Media Advisor and national survey consultant to develop training material for the POD and the nascent Survey Committee so that surveys can be commissioned by the IHEC itself without having to rely on international support.

IFES External Management Advisor has also recommended the development of a Communication Advisory Committee. The committee can identify, in conjunction with the IFES advisor, the key communications objectives it wants to address in its communications strategy and then guide the development and implementation of the communications plan.

#### ***3.3.2: Development of a corporate brand as a professional and independent election management body***

IFES' External Management Advisor has been working with the IHEC on the development of the "IHEC-brand" throughout this reporting period. Initial efforts in the development of the brand focus on compiling the historical informational products that the IHEC has used as outreach material. This process will enable IFES and the IHEC to build a common reference for information and enable the development of a product identity.

IFES advisors have also created draft training material for developing the IHEC's product identity. The material has been discussed during weekly meetings with the IHEC's staff and will be implanted in workshops when finalized. An external consultant will also be brought in next quarter in order to provide specialized expert advice on branding.

### ***Activity 3.4: Capacity Building Training in the Design, Implementation, and Conduct of Voter Information and Educational Programs***

#### ***3.4.2 Review and production of outreach and voter information materials***

Part of IFES' efforts to enhance voter education ability at the IHEC this past quarter includes supporting the IHEC in developing a permanent call center as a means of sustainable public outreach. At the moment, a call center is only created in the run-up to electoral events. IFES is encouraging the IHEC to create a permanent center that can institutionalize the entity so that it does not have to be re-created each time there is an election. IFES also sees value in a permanent call center because it will be able to give timely information to voters, as well as serve as a "living" component of the IHEC.

Training material for the call center was under construction at the time of reporting, and efforts to define the operational parameters of the center will continue in the next quarter.

### ***Activity 3.7: Civil society sub-grants program***

As stated above, IFES has compiled a list of over 250 civil society organizations currently operating in Iraq. While inclusion on this list in no way guarantees funding, or consideration of funding, it does inform selection as the organizations have previous records of receiving funds from international donors. Not only is it a useful database, but it is also a preliminary vetting tool as well as a distribution list to distribute the RFA.

IFES staff has started planning for the Question and Answer sessions that will be held once the RFA is issued. Sessions will be held in the north, south, and west of Iraq, along with Baghdad. Concurrently, IFES is in the process of building a selection committee to review proposals. The committee is likely to include representatives from USAID.

IFES expects to have the RFA issued in the fourth quarter, with funding to commence in or near the beginning of FY2013.

## **IV. FUTURE ACTIVITIES**

As stated above, this past quarter witnessed intensive planning for future events. At the end of June, IFES staff produced a list of training activities running through the end of October 2012, which is the likely date for the new BoC to assume their roles. Much of this work is built on the assessments and strategizing carried out in the past quarter and is in line with the objectives set forth in the Project Implementation Plan and Performance Management Plan.

**Table 3: IFES-Facilitated Workshops, July – October 2012**

Workshop title	Targeted group	Venue	Duration	Proposed date
BRIDGE workshop (Introductory electoral systems and strategic planning)	15 participants from NO and 25 participants from GEOs	Erbil	5 days	August
BRIDGE workshops (Preparing for electoral events)	70 participants from the regional GEOs(close from the workshop venue)	Basrah,Karbala, Sulaymaniya	5 days (each)	Starting from September
GEO POD Planning	Directors and POD staff in GEOs, POD staff from KREO and NO	Erbil	5 days	October
Communications Strategy Development	Section Heads, POD, CBD	Erbil	5 days	September
PE Relationship Management/ PR Relationship Management/ Media Relationship Management	POD, PE from KREO and NO External Media	Baghdad	3 days	September
Budget Execution/Excel Tools and Functions	National office (Finance Department) and the Financial Sections in GEOs	Erbil	5 days	September
Introductory Training in Internal Controls Design, Execution, and Maintenance	National Office (Finance, Administration and Audit Departments), Financial, Administrations and Audit Sections in GEOs.	Erbil	5 days	October

## **V. QUARTERLY PROJECT BURN RATE**

## **VI. CRITICAL ASSUMPTIONS UPDATE**

IFES operates under a number of critical assumptions, which are separated into three contexts: political, security, and operational.<sup>6</sup> As established in the Project Implementation Plan (PMP), IFES reviews the applicability of these assumptions and monitors their influence on the program. Two of these assumptions, both falling under the operational context, were challenged this quarter. They are:

- *The appointment of a new Board of Commissioners in 2012 will occur without delays or disruptions that may have repercussions for the functioning and general operations of the IHEC.*

<sup>6</sup> For a full listing of the critical assumptions underlying this project and their contextual arrangement, please see IFES' Performance Management Plan.

As explained above, the selection of a new BoC has stalled and the current Board's mandate has been extended through July. Per IFES' Project Implementation Plan, a number of activities directly related to the establishment of a new BoC were planned to occur in the first year of programming. These activities include preparing detailed briefings by the IHEC Departments and Sections to the new BoC and conducting specialized trainings for new Commissioners. Both of these activities obviously require a new BoC to be in place. Cognizant of this, IFES has proactively started the process of building detailed briefings, based on the organizational assessments initiated this quarter, with the objective of having these briefings ready to deliver immediately upon the new BoC assuming their new roles. Furthermore, IFES has developed a BRIDGE training that has been tailored to an audience of Commissioners that can be implemented rapidly after the new Board is in place.

There are also planned IFES activities that are indirectly dependent on the creation of a new BoC. These activities include: developing and publishing the IHEC's Strategic Plan; holding an induction workshop on strategic planning for senior IHEC staff; developing a "Strategic Planning Master Plan"; and, defining the IHEC's Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles. While IFES has not worked with the IHEC on strategic planning issues yet, a consultant will be arriving on the project in the next quarter to assist with the development of a strategic planning master plan, which will guide the development of the Strategic Plan itself. The consultant will also assist the IHEC in developing its mission, vision, and guiding principles. If the new BoC takes its seat in July, IFES stands ready to not only have strategic planning expertise on-hand, but also will have introduced the basics of strategic planning to mid- and senior-level staff. To move too far into the strategic planning process before a new Board is in place runs the risk of newly appointed Commissioners feeling as if they do not have a vested stake in the process. IFES prefers that they have ownership in the development process and have competent staff with which to work.

- *IFES staff and consultants will get the necessary visas or permits to work in Iraq.*

The second major challenge to IFES' Critical Assumptions this quarter was the acquisition of visas and permits to operate in Iraq. IFES Iraq staff has been operating on 30-day visas and typically received two 10-day extensions before receiving a 10-day exit visa. The visas are issued at the discretion of the Iraqi MoI, and have only been available with 30-day validity for the past two quarters. When visas expire, IFES Iraq staff has been forced to leave the country in order to return and activate new visas. Though IFES has made every effort to have its staff enter on new visas when returning from leave, so as to combine trips and avoid needlessly requesting international travel, this was not logistically possible for every trip this past quarter.

Compounding the visa issue is the fact that IFES rebid for a new security provider and expected the new security company to assume responsibility on 1 July 2012. The outgoing security provider informed IFES that its staff would not be permitted to stay in Iraq on visas it procured. At the end of the third quarter, IFES requested international travel for some of its staff in order to leave the country and re-enter on visas acquired by the new security provider.

IFES has attempted to meet these challenges by responding to instruction from USAID, provided on 4 June, which outlines the process of acquiring long term visas without assistance from a security provider. At the time of reporting, IFES has submitted to the MoI all of the documents required for long-term visas. However, the processing times advised by USAID — 10 days — differ from the ones advised by the MoI - 15 days.

## **VII. EVALUATION/CONCLUSIONS**

Three primary conclusions can be drawn from the activities of FY12Q3. The first conclusion is that institutional capacity building is still very much required. IFES assessments this quarter show that the IHEC has some way to go until it can operate with minimal international assistance. The primary obstacle is less-than-effective management procedures, particularly in the areas of finance and administration. As demonstrated above, for example, this has hindered its ability to maintain its ICT infrastructure to a high standard. Part of the budget execution impairment is related to excessive procedures guiding purchasing. IFES advisors have already streamlined a procedure related to expense review and will continue to improve the IHEC's financial management capacity to bring it closer to the standards of other electoral management bodies.

The second conclusion that can be taken from this quarter is that public outreach activities have been historically shortsighted. This is not necessarily negative, however, as a number of elections were required after 2003 in order to ensure the legitimacy of post-war government. IFES sees the next phase of public outreach assistance characterized by a long-term and sustainable approach. With the cancellation of the Kurdish elections this fall, IFES has received an additional few months to build the fundamental capacities of the public outreach division. It is hoped that in this time, the IHEC recognizes the golden opportunity it has to establish a highly competent and future-oriented entity within the institution.

The final conclusion is that the complicated political environment is unlikely to change in the near term. This is not a sustainable environment. Although there have been calls for Maliki to be removed, accompanied by threats from Maliki to disband parliament - the core issue remains: Iraqi politicians are fragmented and have the ability to mutually stymie political processes. The effect of this is to lower the opportunity costs for politicians to attack government institutions. As evidenced this quarter, the IHEC is by no means immune to political assault, and it may be expected to face such challenges in the future.

